

DONATELLA IZZO

Women, Portraits, and Painters:
"The Madonna of the Future"
and "The Sweetheart of M. Briseux"

It is a well-known fact that Henry James's work is especially rich in finely drawn women characters. Many of his short stories enjoy a privileged status in this respect. They are not simply James's *representation* of women characters. They are the successful outcome of his critical confrontation with the *question* of women's representation—a question that is cultural and ideological as well as artistic.¹

One of James's favorite ways of confronting such a question is the exploration of the implications inherent in the notion of beauty. As a fundamental category of all artistic experience and simultaneously as a crucial value in the image of women as it has been constructed in modern Western culture, beauty draws woman into the aesthetic sphere, thus making problematic both her hold on the existential dimension and her relation with temporality. Woman, beauty, time, and art object: these are the basic elements which James's stories tirelessly analyze and combine into ever new and more complex patterns over a forty-year period.

The comparatively unripe yet nonetheless amazingly rich fruits of James's early confrontation with this conceptual cluster are two stories from 1873, "The Madonna of the Future" and "The Sweetheart of M. Briseux." Focusing on a thematic and dramatic antithesis between a real woman and her artistic reproduction, these two stories set the basic features of a woman/representation dialectics in James's work that proceeds from opposition, through equivalence (the symbolic and dramatic exchange of woman versus statue in "The Last of the Valerii," woman versus carved gem in "Adina"), to reach substitution in such stories as "Rose-Agathe" or

"Glasses." In these latter stories, the substitution of woman by her representation becomes the only way of assuring the unalterable survival of beauty—a value of which woman, in her material existence, is finally seen to be nothing more than a contingent symbol. Such a substitution, therefore, becomes James's *"mise-en-scène* of that absence of the 'real' woman that is the necessary support of the attribution of beauty" (Pacteau 12): an extreme version of the reification and aestheticization of man-woman relations in the cultural universe he is exploring.

1. The Muse's Betrayal: "The Madonna of the Future"

Dramatis Personae: Theobald, an American painter in Florence, elated by the close contact with classical art but also overwhelmed by the unattainable paragon of perfection it represents; Serafina, a woman whose once unsurpassable beauty is slowly but inevitably fading, and who is loved platonically and revered by Theobald as the perfect model of a Madonna yet to be painted: the epitome of all former Madonnas, rivalling those of Raphael and Michaelangelo; her lover, a clever and prolific sculptor of commercially successful, obscene zoomorphic statuettes; the circle of American expatriates, lovers and patrons of the arts, who despise Theobald for his inability to bring forth the promised masterpiece; and an occasional friend of the painter's, a young American recently arrived in Florence. An ironic and puzzled observer at first, the latter becomes more and more sympathetic with Theobald and involved in his story: after involuntarily causing him to realize his failure (Serafina is now too old for a Madonna, and the painter is unequal to the task he has been setting himself for twenty years), he becomes the deeply affected witness to his despair and death, and the posthumous defender of his memory and of the actual existence of the masterpiece which, in fact, has never been painted. These are the outlines—teeming with literary reminiscences²—of the story, as told many years later by H., the painter's friend, whose first-person narrative is in turn framed by that of a nameless narrator, a guest at the same dinner party.

"The Madonna of the Future" owes much of its renown to Theobald's passionate plea for art in America, a veritable collection of memorable and oft-quoted sentences: "We are the disinherited of Art! . . . An American, to excel, has just ten times as much to learn as a European. . . . We poor

aspirants must live in perpetual exile" (3: 15). It hardly comes as a surprise, then, that "The Madonna of the Future" has always been read as a tale of the artist, as a metafictional treatment of the problem of art for Americans and, more generally, of the role of art in the modern age, when everything has been touched by the vulgar hand of commerce and the great ideals of classical art are no longer viable. Such an interpretation is also supported by a comparison of James's tale with its literary sources: Balzac's "Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu," Alfred de Musset's *Lorenzaccio*, and two poems by Browning, "Pictor Ignotus, Florence 15—" and "Andrea del Sarto." Each of these sources is scrupulously cited in the text and from each, as critics have noted,³ James has drawn themes and situations. Browning's poems stage different versions of the artist's failure: Pictor Ignotus shuns the world for fear of contaminating his art; Andrea del Sarto has extraordinary technical skills but does not possess "the soul," that ideal quality which makes Raphael's painting sublime. In Musset's play, Tebaldeo is a minor character, a painter, a pupil of Raphael and an admirer of the old Masters, whose technical achievements, however, he cannot hope to emulate: "je sais mieux aimer les arts que je ne sais les exercer"; in James's tale, Theobald's description of his secluded life is taken literally from Tebaldeo's in the play. In "Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu," old Frenhofer's failure is due to his maniacal perfectionism: in pursuit of an unattainable ideal of absolute truth to nature, he keeps adding layer upon layer of finishing touches to his masterpiece, thus turning it into a chaos of colors and lines whose only definite feature—a relic of masterliness submerged in madness—is a woman's perfect, "living" foot.

It is not my purpose, however, to read "The Madonna of the Future" as a canonical stage in James's metafictional treatment of the artist as character. Rather, I wish to shift focus from the painter to the subject of the painting—if only to ascertain that, even in this respect, a comparison of James's tale with its intertexts can be revealing.

Even while foregrounding art and the artist as their main theme, James's sources are all haunted by female presences. Tebaldeo rejects Lorenzo's request that he paint the portrait of a famous Florentine courtesan, alleging his inability to paint anything but Florence, which is like a mother to him; Lorenzo's reply is that Florence is a whore, and the image of the city as a whore, accompanied by a lament over its decline, runs through the whole play. Andrea del Sarto blames his incapacity to attain the

sublime on his wife and model Lucrezia, an exceedingly beautiful but soulless woman, whose greed prompts her to betray him as both husband and artist, by inducing him to vilify his art in a quest for money rather than glory. The psychological pathos and drama in his monologue lie precisely in the ambiguous link connecting Andrea's artistic failure and his relationship with his wife: on the one hand, Lucrezia's greed and moral emptiness are the motive for her husband's failure; on the other hand, she represents the painter's alibi for that failure, and thus hints at a deeper psychological causality: the antithesis of woman and art which is implied in creativity, conceived in Freudian terms as sublimation. Andrea is unable to make a choice, and thus wavers between claiming and regretting his allegiance to his wife. He alternates between extolling his physical possession of her as compensation enough ("Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold/You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!/Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;/The Roman's is the better when you pray,/But still the other's Virgin was his wife—/Men will excuse me") and making invidious comparisons between the "wifeless" masters' work and his own—"Why do I need you?/What wife had Rafael, or has Angelo?" He ends up simply confronting his failure once again, simultaneously blaming it on Lucrezia and claiming it as his own: "... So—still they overcome/ Because there's still Lucrezia,—as I choose." In Balzac's tale, woman plays a threefold role: the first is abstract, as the subject *par excellence* of pictorial representation, and therefore the abstract touchstone for truth to nature in rendering and execution, in the long opening discussion; the second is concrete, as the flesh-and-blood woman, Gillette, the artist Poussin's lover and model, an object of love but also of barter (Poussin offers her as a model to old Frenhofer, thus jeopardizing both her modesty and their mutual love, in the hope of gaining a glimpse of the mysterious masterpiece he is finishing); and finally the symbolic object, a woman-picture complete with name and citizenship—Catherine Lescault, "la Belle Noiseuse," an object of passionate and jealous love for old Frenhofer, who, unlike Poussin, shelters her from the gaze of other men ("It would be an awful prostitution!"), regarding her as "my creature, my spouse" and as quite human: "'I have been living with this woman for ten years, she is mine, mine only, and she loves me. Hasn't she smiled to me each time I touched her with my brush? She has got a soul, the soul I bestowed on her'" (my translation).

James's sources, then, offer a wide range of women's roles: whore and

symbol of a city, blank soul and perfection of forms, wife and Virgin Mary, lover and marketable object, betrayer and scapegoat, love object *as* art object, love object *versus* art object. In James's tale all these roles overlap and melt into a single complex character which is the one original, unprecedented creation in "The Madonna of the Future." Apart from any more general analogies, the interplay between the artist's creative failure and a female figure is the specific thematic core James's tale shares with its sources. In its openly displayed intertextuality, which builds up its rich, polysemic connotative context, James's tale represents a rewriting of, and an attempt at thinking anew, a tangle of issues bearing less on the generic problem of the artist than on the problem—or rather, the *problematic quality*—of woman as inspiring muse and as object of artistic representation.

This assessment of the story allows us to apprehend more fully the most powerful implication of the title. The word "Madonna" is a locus of exceptional semantic concentration, for here an artistic and a religious paradigm coalesce into a single image—an image of a *woman*.

Whenever Madonnas are under discussion women are under discussion, as Lynne Pearce remarks while in her turn discussing another Madonna—*The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti: and only by taking a deliberately perverse stand in the face of critical tradition can one attempt to understand fully what is being said:

Rossetti's *The Virgin* is interpreted as a religious painting by a cultural consensus that extends from the nineteenth century to the present day; it is a painting *about women* only through ignorance. . . . or at the point we start breaking the rules. (Pearce 35)

At the point we start breaking the rules, "The Madonna of the Future" too, like Rossetti's painting, becomes a statement about women, as well as one of James's first serious metanarrative reflections upon the terms of the cultural and artistic representation of women. The confrontation staged in this text is not so much that between the American artist and European art as a confrontation between divergent versions of femininity: a confrontation, in other words, between the Virgin Mary and Serafina.

From an artistic point of view, the Virgin Mary had dominated European iconography for centuries. Through Raphael, she had become

the very emblem of painting, just as the *Mona Lisa* would come to be considered through the influence of Walter Pater: a paradigm of classic art as compositional balance, harmony, and formal perfection. From a religious point of view, she embodied the mystery of virginal motherhood, a paradox transcending both natural law and human reason; mediatrix between God and mankind, she was the emblem of a simultaneously powerful and submissive femininity, unattainable transcendence. and loving mother at one and the same time. Culturally, she was the sublimated image of purity and chastity as feminine ideals of perfection, while at the same time embodying the archetype of motherhood. The Madonna functioned as the key figure for women's education, a model for women to identify with. The influence of this model was felt not only in Catholic countries but found realization in the Protestant world as well, in that secularized Victorian version, the Angel in the House, an image combining virginal purity with maternal dedication. Cultural history and art meet if one remembers that in Victorian England Raphael was regarded primarily as a painter of sweet Madonnas, and became the object of a para-aesthetic cult which led in turn to the Pre-Raphaelite reaction. An involuntary ally and an objective accomplice of Victorian sentimentalization, Raphael is the perfect signifier of an idealizing and simplifying use of classical art, and at the same time, of the ideological version of femininity which it is made to express.

A single signifier, then, is made to convey a whole cluster of associations, amounting to an extraordinary cultural synthesis: woman and cult object, art object and model for behavior. As soon as one begins to sort out and expound the implications of the term "Madonna," the "Madonna of the Future" no longer appears simply as the result of an iconographic tradition, nor can its impossibility be reduced to the artist's defeat vis-à-vis an unattainable tradition. The unresolvable contradiction lies elsewhere; its name is the name of Theobald's faded muse, Serafina.

A Muse—"the active memory of a tradition which is voicelessly voiced through her, ... the source of creativity as locus and object for the male gaze" (Rasy 83; my translation)—Serafina is the living synthesis of the tradition Theobald is eager to attain: a real woman, but idealized in such terms as to make her the object of a simultaneously aesthetic and religious cult:

... "Can you look upon a beautiful woman with reverent eyes?"

... When at last I had assured him that I could undertake to temper

admiration with respect, he informed me, with an air of religious mystery, that it was in his power to introduce me to the most beautiful woman in Italy. "A beauty with a soul!

"This woman's beauty ... is a lesson, a morality, a poem! It's my daily study."
(3: 30)

The reason for such a twofold cult stems, as we later learn, from the striking effect of their first meeting:

"... You should have seen the mother and the child together, seen them as I first saw them,—the mother with her head draped in a shawl, a divine trouble in her face, and the bambino pressed to her bosom. You would have said, I think, that Raphael had found his match in common chance.... She, too, was a maiden mother, and she had been turned out into the world in her shame. I felt in all my pulses that here was my subject marvellously realized. I felt like one of the old convent artists who had had a vision. I rescued the poor creatures, cherished them, watched them as I would have done some precious work of art, some lovely fragment of fresco discovered in a moldering cloister." (3: 35-36)

Serafina's apparition before Theobald renders her forever in his eyes as both a living picture *and* the Virgin Mary; it produces an aesthetic ecstasy which utterly submerges any dissonant implications present, in view of Mary's virginal connotations, in being a "maiden mother," not in supernatural experience but rather in worldly experience. Despite her name—a reminder of angelic choirs—and despite the adjectives Theobald constantly lavishes on her ("the divine Serafina," 35), Serafina is not simply a paragon of beauty and spirituality. She mingles spirit and matter, the church and the marketplace, from her very first appearance: "She had been that morning to confession; she had also been to market, and had bought a chicken for dinner" (3: 32). Even though she is embroidering an ecclesiastical vestment in gold and silver and wearing a silver cross; even though her head has a "sanctified bend" (3: 33) and her hair makes "a covering as chaste and formal as the veil of a nun" (3: 32), the disenchanted narrator immediately suspects this "*bourgeoise* Egeria" of betraying "a rather vulgar stagnation of mind" (3: 33), and of being not just advanced in years but "simply coarse" (3: 33). Despite the impression she gives of being "some pious lay-member of a sisterhood, living by special permission

outside her convent walls" (3: 34), the narrator thinks her likely to be a mere kept woman, profiting from the painter's "Platonic ecstasy" (3: 31) and ready to make a fool of him, taking the situation "rather less *au sérieux* than her friend" (3: 33). Serafina's dignified, undecipherable behavior makes such inferences impossible to prove at the first encounter; they seem to be verified, however, when the narrator, on going to her house again for news of Theobald, finds her in the company of "a gentleman,—an individual, at least, of the male sex" (3: 39), and in a far from Raphaelesque attitude:

With one hand she held in her lap a plate of smoking macaroni; with the other she had lifted high in the air one of the pendulous filaments of this succulent compound, and was in the act of slipping it gently down her throat. (3: 39)

The Madonna is eating macaroni; in her lap, instead of the Holy Child, rests a steaming dish. The dissonance, worthy of a Duchamp, elicits from the narrator a sharp, though unvoiced, reproof: "'Prove at least that one old woman can be faithful'" (3: 49) are the words he will later address to Theobald's old landlady, thus implicitly contrasting her solicitude with Serafina's "unfaithfulness." Interestingly enough, the narrator's accusations have continued to resound in the gratuitously strong feelings and abusive language of some critics who, even while "officially" dealing with the artistic theme of the story, manage to place the blame for Theobald's artistic failure wholly on Serafina, "a woman of too philistine and materialist a stamp to understand or appreciate the exceptional qualities of her admirer, ... a rather coarse and shopworn townswoman, ... capable ... of betraying her artist's devotion by keeping up a vulgar liaison with another man" (Ross 35).⁴ Such reproofs are, quite evidently, a vehemently misogynistic response to the perception of female prominence in the text and represent a reductionist way of dealing, in terms of moral responsibility, personal inadequacy, and "betrayal," with what is instead an *objective* and *structural* impediment.

The reason why the "Madonna of the Future" will never be painted is that it is conceived in mutually exclusive terms: both as the consummation of a time-honored tradition—with its accompanying cultural models of femininity—and as a *portrait*, that is, the picture of a *real* woman. Woman in her actual reality, woman in her physical form, is the

element *in excess* which irrevocably explodes the idealistic crystallization of woman as an aesthetic and as a sacred object. The hypostasis of woman as a Madonna—timeless beauty and spotless purity—, taking no account of her gendered identity, of her material existence, and of the passage of time, is just as much a reason for the artist's failure as the unequal confrontation with the classics. The structural impossibility of a "Madonna of the Future" lies in its being grounded in the idealization of a woman who refuses to be idealized but demands instead to be recognized and accepted for what she *is*: a creature of the real world, with multiple, and even conflicting dimensions. James's story makes a statement about women in Serafina's voice, giving her a memorable remark which is both a rebuttal of the accusatory critical readings to come and a denunciation of all kinds of idealization, and male projections, which would impose on women a rule of conduct and a standard to be judged by:

"And I can tell you this, signore, I never deceived him. Who put it into his head that I was made to live on holy thoughts and fine phrases? It was his own fancy, and it pleased him to think so." (3: 51)

Theobald's failure, then, is as much the result of idealizing classical art as of idealizing woman: "Lovely Madonna, model at once and muse, I call you to witness that I too am an idealist!" (3: 21). But Raphael's Madonna, taken as a timeless paradigm, is an unrealistic model, life-denying both on the artistic and on the cultural plane, and destructive for anyone who embraces it. Beauty, whether in an object of art or in a woman, when hypostatized in such an abstract manner, regardless of actualities—be they of history, of the marketplace, or of daily life—, becomes unattainable. Sealed in an irrecoverable past, it is deprived of all present and all future: the "Madonna of the Future," thus envisaged, becomes an oxymoron. Raphael's aesthetic harmony was itself historically contingent, the product of an age when "people's religious and aesthetic needs went hand in hand, and there was ... a demand for the Blessed Virgin" (3: 22). Painting Madonnas was no heroic deed then: all one needed to do was conform to the law of supply and demand. But anyone who tries to reproduce Raphael's art today can only make a sterile gesture: time, while canonizing it, has also unredeemably reified and commodified it. The only possible reproduction of the *Madonna of the Chair* at this point in time is the "huge miniature

copy" bedecking Mrs Coventry—the American patroness, "high-priestess of the arts," whose Florence apartment, thanks to the power of money, is "a sort of Pitti Palace *au petit pied*" (3: 26). In similar fashion, Serafina's beauty, which has been slowly fading as "one by one, the noiseless years had ebbed away, and left him brooding in charmed inaction, forever preparing for a work forever deferred" (3: 37), survives now only as the irrecoverable memory of a fleeting moment Theobald was unable to grasp because too occupied with the momentous preparations required to immortalize it, all too slowly: for haste in the presence of beauty is blasphemy, and eternity is what a painter has to aim for. So that Theobald's miserable cry—"I must make up my Madonna out of *de beaux restes!* What a masterpiece she'll be! Old—old! Old—old!" (3: 37)—applies equally well to the human model as to the artistic one, foreshadowing a condition that might be termed a "painting of exhaustion" *ante litteram*.

Theobald's double failure stages James's parallel confrontation with the temporal dimension of art, and with woman as an object of cultural as well as iconographic representation. As several critics have remarked,⁵ the contrast between the Virgin Mary and Serafina, which I have been tracing so far, has its counterpart in the contrast between Theobald's impotent aesthetic idealism and Serafina's lover's clever naturalism and artistic prolificness. His statuettes, portraying cats and monkeys "'studied from life'" (3: 45) that reproduce life at a level of mere sensuality, owe their durability not to the eternity of an Idea, but to the solidity of a new patent material—"as durable as *bronze,—aere perennius*, signore!" Whereas Theobald, as evidence of the purity of his intentions, prides himself on having never sold a single picture,⁶ the sculptor offers to produce customized subjects, hands out visiting cards and price-lists ("my prices are moderate. Only sixty francs for a little group like that," 3: 45). An unknowing witness to Benjamin's later theories, he displays the products of his ingenuity "'in Paris, on the Boulevard, in a shop of which they constitute the specialty. There is always a crowd about the window'" (3: 43).

It would be a mistake, however, to read such an antithesis in the light of Theobald's metaphysical idealism.⁷ While the painter, on the one hand, is engaged in a relentless defense of the ideal lest it be polluted by however diminutive a particle of reality, James's story, on the other hand, radically questions any such reductionism or simplification. Structured as it is around a series of sharp antitheses plentifully offered and openly

displayed,⁸ "The Madonna of the Future" actually negotiates such antitheses in the same way that it negotiates the antinomy of realism and idealism, Madonnas and spaghetti. Its strategy is not to choose either of these alternatives but, rather, to stage their confrontation, thus opening the path, within its own structure, for a dialectical tension of opposites. Theobald's "transcendent illusions and deplorable failure" are still held in suspension, at the very end of the story, with the Shakespearian "cats and monkeys" (3: 52); Raphael's Madonnas, it is said, were possibly nothing but "'pretty blondes of that period, enhanced by the Raphaelesque touch'" (3: 22) and made into Madonnas to meet the demands of the local market. As for the antinomy of flesh and soul, which leads Theobald to extract the Virgin Mary from the maiden mother, and to keep the diurnal, fleshy dimension separate from the silver glimmer surrounding the embroideress at night, the recurrent use of images lending Theobald's passion sensual overtones reveals the mutual implication of the would-be separate spheres: paintings are "chaste" (3: 19), the ideal is something one can "woo" (3: 21), Florence is a city one can have "a very old affair" (3: 23) with, or describe "like a lover" (3: 23), as "some beautiful older woman with a 'history'" (3: 24) one falls in love with. Such a self-delusion, incidentally, is unwittingly played out again in certain critical readings of the story that explicitly ignore the element of gender underlying the story, only to displace it onto the well-worn, transparent metaphor of creative "impotence," thus reaffirming a link between manhood and creativity that is already ironically underscored in the tale through the small, wiry, dark, hairy "individual of the male sex," the fecund sculptor, Serafina's lover.

However, it is above all Serafina who defies polarization and simplification: both Virgin Mary *and* maiden mother, both nun *and* lover, both embroideress of silvery vestments by candlelight and eater of succulent spaghetti by daylight. An avatar of all her literary ancestresses, whose multiple ambivalent overtones she compounds, Serafina does not idealistically transcend oppositions; rather, she *contains* them and, literally, *embodies* them. Her coherence is that of her life-story; it is that of her body—beautiful, but marked by the passing years; it is, finally, that of her full voice, claiming her own identity and her right to exist on her own terms, rather than simply conform to cultural stereotypes and other people's projections. Her voice is appropriated by James's story, which stages a confrontation between a woman and her representations and denounces

through her the terms of such representations, thus making itself simultaneously a critique of ideology and a metafictional statement: a manifesto for an art that will critically confront the opposites of idealization and commodification, and keep them suspended in an unsolved dialectics which is in itself a staging of the dilemmas of modernity. The "Madonna of the Future," as Guido Fink has noted, is achieved not in the painting but in the tale: which is neither a beast-like statuette nor a stylized Madonna, but the real-life portrayal of a woman, whose wrinkles show on the canvas, and whose name is Serafina.

2. *The Betrayed Muse: "The Sweetheart of M. Briseux"*

In Henry James's multifaceted world, each situation has its own mirror image. "The Sweetheart of M. Briseux," published a few months after "The Madonna of the Future," makes use of much the same basic elements—woman, painter, portrait, time, immortality—but inverts their operation and their function, thus exploring the other side of the coin.⁹

The story, as usual, is framed by the narrative of the visit that the nameless narrator, an American, makes to the diminutive museum of the small French town where the celebrated painter Pierre Briseux was born. Hanging on the wall is the masterpiece, exhibited about thirty years before in the 1836 *Salon*, which had made him famous overnight: the *Portrait of a Lady in a Yellow Shawl*, or *Portrait of M.lle X*. The amazed narrator recognizes the original of the portrait in an elderly American spinster, the only other visitor to the gallery. This woman later meets the narrator and tells him the whole story, which he reports "literally," as he declares, keeping her first-person speech, and only premising "a single absent clause: she must in those days have been a wonderfully charming girl" (3: 59). A young woman of twenty-one, poor and with no relations, the young woman had become engaged to Harold Staines—as rich, handsome, and socially faultless as he was conceited, pedantic, and untalented—and had followed him to Paris, where he meant to become a painter. Once in Paris, having ceased to regard him as a paragon of perfection, she had kept postponing the date for the wedding, notwithstanding its advantages for a woman in her position. Finally, she had promised that she would name the day once Staines had painted her portrait. While she was alone in the studio,

disappointedly gazing at the portrait her fiancé was unable to achieve, a stranger rushed in—a Bohemian with a "prodigious shock of thick black curls" (3: 75) and "eyes really of fire" (3: 76). It was Briseux, then a penniless and obscure young painter, come to the studio to borrow the money for the canvas and colors needed to express his genius. Indignant at the ugliness of Staines' work—a waste of canvas and color—he grasped the palette, draped the young woman in a yellow shawl Staines had discarded as a "meretricious ornament" (3: 74), and started painting his masterpiece. When Staines came in and asked the woman to follow him at once or give him up forever, she immediately made her choice: to stay, and allow Briseux to finish his picture. She never saw either the painting or the painter again, and went back to the States alone.

Two painters, two portraits, and a woman faced with a choice; a choice, at a first level, between two opposite men and worlds, following Jane Austen's tradition of female *Bildungsroman*, usually culminating in marriage. The text sets up the contrast between the two men in the most explicit manner: the one is handsome and blond, distinguished and impeccable, stiff and frigid, dignified and sententious; the other is dark, "meagre and vulgar" (3: 75-76), unconventional and agitated, rash and passionate. The former utters only a few laconic lines, the latter pours forth a passionate speech. The former is a "decorous young Apollo" (3: 61) as flawless as "a beautiful statue" (3: 65), the latter is quick and feverish, "flushed and dishevelled" (3: 81). Staines is compared to "a musical symphony, of which only certain brief, unresonant notes were audible" (3: 68) and whose "grave notes were the beginning and end of his character" (3: 68); Briseux is like "some ardent pianist, plunging deeper into a passionate symphony and devouring the key-board with outstretched arms" (3: 81). Staines is a static object, Briseux is a creative subject. Finally, the former has an adolescent quality (the ever-present protective wing of that cumbersome mother-figure, Mrs Staines) and takes on effeminate connotations ("Monsieur Staines? Surprising! I should have sworn it was the work of a *jeune fille*," 3: 70, an observer exclaims while perusing one of his paintings), whereas the other has precociously consumed the inexperience of youth ("*Il faut que jeunesse se passe!* Mine has passed at a rattling pace, ill-mounted though it was," 3: 76) and emphatically declares himself a man: "Now I only ask to do a man's work with a man's will" (3: 76). This strongly gendered identity is also connotatively reinforced by

lexical choices explicitly evoking his manhood, such as his eyes "penetration" (3: 76) or the "penetrating authority" (3: 77) of his way of speaking, "forcing" (3: 77) the young woman to respect his opinion.

Both as men and as painters, then, Staines and Briseux can be said to embody opposite social and cultural patterns: sexual immaturity vs. prepossessing manhood, bourgeois respectability vs. Bohemian freedom, academic vs. romantic painting.¹⁰ What the young woman chooses to give up by giving up Staines is the preordained fate of a bourgeois wife: the world of economic security and respectability, but also of flatness, convention, self-denial, and dependence. In the description she gives of him, Staines is the perfect embodiment of a superficially faultless but inherently void respectability: the *reductio ad absurdum* of a patriarchal system too evidently grounded in mere convention, whose claims for authority and respect go hand in hand with an utter lack of personal value:

... he was not a man of genius; and yet, to listen to him at times, you would have vowed at least that he might be. He dealt out his opinions as if they were celestial manna, and nothing was more common than for him to say, "You remember, a month ago, I told you so-and-so;" meaning that he had laid down the law on some point and expected me to engrave it on my heart. (3: 70-71)

In sharp contrast, art becomes the touchstone and sum of all those values, not related to the social sphere, in which both Harold Staines and his philistine world are equally lacking. It is hardly by chance that the ground the young woman chooses for Staines' pre-marital trial is art: Staines' conceit gives way here, for it is now his turn to be on probation.¹¹ Artistic failure occasions an inversion of roles—the ultimate offence, not to love but to self-image: "the sore point with him was not that he had lost me, but that I had ventured to judge him" (3: 87).

For better or for worse, what the young woman is giving up is clear enough; less so what she gets in exchange. "'You give up the man who has offered you an honorable affection, a name, a fortune.... What you get the Lord knows!'" (3: 85), Staines cries out at the climactic moment, thus summing up—correctly, for once—the terms of the question. It turns out to be a lame alternative: although she forgoes the opportunity of becoming Mrs Staines, the young woman, nevertheless, will never become "the sweetheart of M. Briseux." The expectations raised by the title of the story,

and repeatedly reinforced in the opening scene by commonplaces and insinuations on the scanty morality of "*Ces artistes!*" (3: 55), are, as we find out, misleading: the transgressive love story set in a romantic Bohemia never even begins to take shape, and the implications of the title appear in retrospect to be pointing ironically to its *absence*. Possibly, this is to be read as a concession on James's part to Victorian morality, forbidding him to make a "fallen woman" into the heroine of his story. This story could also be seen as his earliest attempt to sketch a poetics of the "non-story," to be fully developed in such a later work as "The Story in It." The young woman's choice, it is true, can be regarded as the germ of a subdued and submerged love story; all the same, the manifest denial of the expectations manifestly raised by the ironic choice of "sweetheart" explodes the carefully constructed symmetry of the contrast between the two men, thus undermining a reading of the story as sentimental education, with the heroine teaching herself to choose between two contrasting men, loves, and ways of life. Once the alternatives are perceived as asymmetrical, the reader's attention is readjusted from the sentimental plot to what is, after all, the first literal object of the young woman's choice: a choice, not between two men, but between two *portraits*.

In the dramatic development of this story, the portrait, as I have tried to show, works as a test both of truth and of manhood, following a time-honored tradition that links man's potency and creative power: "Could you ever have finished my portrait?" (3: 86) is the young woman's implicitly accusatory, unanswered question, which seals her fiancé's final departure from her. Painting a portrait has affective, intellectual, and cultural implications as well as artistic ones: it means grasping and understanding the portrayed subject's identity, selecting and discriminating its traits, reproducing them according to codes that are not merely aesthetic but cultural as well. It means, in other words, to perform an act of *representation*, in the widest and most meaningful sense. The young woman's demand that Staines paint her own portrait, instead of a copy of *Mona Lisa* as he had intended to, points to a twofold implication. On the one hand, by projecting herself onto Leonardo's subject, she is explicitly offering herself as one more avatar of that complex, ambiguous femininity Walter Pater had mythologized at the time of the composition of this story (which is set, of course, thirty years earlier): "Paint my portrait. I promise to be difficult enough" (3: 73).¹² On the other hand, by setting herself as an

alternative to such a canonized painting, she demands to be confronted and comprehended for what she is, regardless of academic rules and misleading "copying": "'Why then copy a portrait when you can copy an original?'" (3: 73). But copying an *original—coping* with an original—is just what Staines, a non-entity outside the grid of convention, cannot and will not do: if his portrait is "slight and crude, . . . unpromising and unflattering" (3: 75), it is so not merely due to the painter's lack of technical skill, but out of an inadequacy that is more ideological than technical. His inability is that of confronting a real woman—"an original"—in all her intensity and richness of nuances, for which he wants to substitute, through the agency of the portrait, a set of limited and limiting norms. His choice of dress, color, and attitude is not the result of aesthetic or expressive needs but springs from a repressive will to control, from a notion of decorum limiting the range of female potentialities and confining woman, with the complicity of commonplace and stereotype, within the strictest conventionality:

I brought with me a number of draperies among which was the yellow shawl you have just been admiring. We wore such things then, just as we played on the harp and read "Corinne." I tried on my scarfs and veils, one after the other, but Harold was satisfied with none. The yellow shawl, in especial, he pronounced a meretricious ornament, and decided that I should be represented in a plain dark dress, with as few accessories as possible. He quoted with a bow the verse about beauty when unadorned, and began his work. (3: 73-74)

Stiff with ideology and social convention, Staines' portrait represents less the woman portrayed than its own codes of representation: it is expressive, not of its subject, but of the painter himself:

"Is it weak—cold—ignorant?"

"Weak, cold, ignorant, stiff, hopeless! And, on top of all, pretentious—oh, pretentious as the façade of the Madeleine!" (3: 77)

The portrait painted by Briseux is, in comparison, something more than a great artist's original masterpiece. The long *ekphrasis* in the opening paragraphs does not simply describe the outline of the painting, the chromatic contrast the bright yellow makes on the dark background, the vividness and energy of the artist's touch: what it also emphasizes is that,

true to the transitive nature of portraiture, this painting goes beyond the pictorial surface and hints at something outside itself—an intense and complex personality which, rather than annihilating, it manifests and reveals:

As I continued to look, however, I began to wonder whether it did not contain something better still—the reflection of a countenance very nearly as deep and ardent as the artist's talent. In spite of the expressive repose of the figure the brow and mouth wore a look of smothered agitation, the dark gray eye almost glittered, and the flash in the cheek burned ominously. Evidently this was the picture of something more than a yellow shawl. To the analytic eye it was the picture of a mind, or at least of a mood. (3: 55)

There are, it is true, obvious traces in this description (as well as in the story that follows) of a mystique of portrait-painting—the myth of the painter who can, if he is a truly great artist, go beyond appearances and grasp the very essence of the person being portrayed.¹³ James had already experimented with this theme in 1868, in a story which figures in his oeuvre as the prototype of the portrait motif: "The Story of a Masterpiece." Here the rich widower Lennox discovers the superficial and heartless nature of his beautiful fiancée Marian Everett through the agency of a portrait of her, painted by Baxter—a talented artist who had formerly been in love with Marian and whom she had deserted. Lennox is so upset by the discovery that, although he cannot back out of the wedding, he stabs the portrait repeatedly. Indeed, a plot such as this sounds like an acritical acceptance of the myth of the artist, even though there is a mitigating hint that Baxter achieves his masterpiece not simply through supernatural artistic intuition but through his actual acquaintance with Marian; all the same, the female character here is presented as *truly* coinciding with the representation of her the portrait provides, with no margin for complexity or ambiguity; even the short passage directly focused on Marian's point of view offers no alternative vantage point: quite the reverse, since its function is to confirm the judgments passed on her by other characters and to make the reader, as it were, "personally" acquainted with her lack of ethical values and her empty superficiality. The few hints offered by her self-justification ("She had cared for nothing but pleasure; but to what else were girls brought up?" 1: 292)¹⁴ are not sufficient to provide an investigation of the cultural operations whereby female identity is produced, as is the case later in "Julia Bride."

At a few years' distance, however, "The Sweetheart of M. Briseux" represents a much less moralistic and a rather more complex version of the portrait motif, in spite of the questionably emphatic treatment of Briseux whose characterization makes use of the whole repertoire of "genius and unruliness," with no trace of the critical and self-critical irony to be found in the later story "Mora Montravers." The relation connecting the woman protagonist and her portrait is here much more complicated and problematic than mere mimetic reproduction—however intuitive and faithful—of the former in the latter.

It is, first of all, a two-way relation, a matter not just of mimesis but of passionate identification: the woman *is* the portrait, and her identification is such as to make her feel the blow almost physically when Staines angrily throws a brush against the portrait: "I raised my hands to my face as if I felt the blow" (3: 82).¹⁵ But it is not just the artistic quality of Briseux's painting that allows this identification, just as the pictorial inadequacy of Staines's portrait does not entirely account for the young woman's rejection of it. Briseux's portrait gives momentary existence to a colorful, daring, romantic, transgressive identity: it has a liberating power, both aesthetically and culturally, for it liberates its subject from the representations of womanhood that the dark shades and stiff poise of Staines's picture implied. The yellow shawl is its conceptual as well as chromatic focus: significantly rejected by Staines, it is a symbolic cipher of transgression that, in his anti-academic choice of a bright and gaudy color, the artist shares with the woman. By draping herself in the yellow shawl, the young woman takes on a romantic, heterodox identity, in sharp contrast to the literally and metaphorically dull colors that her self-representation as a bourgeois wife would impose on her.

But there is more to it than this: this daring, passionate woman, the woman in the yellow shawl, will be made to live forever in the portrait. "I'll make you immortal" (3: 85) had been Briseux's only promise—and this is, finally, the real stake in her choice: not love but immortality. Entrance into the aesthetic sphere is contrasted, as a euphoric alternative, to a future as Staines's wife that is already wholly prefigured by a set of inexorable metaphors: "I asked myself sternly whether I was ready to rise and take his arm and let him lead me blindfold through life" (3: 85)—which, incidentally, foreshadows the implications of female blindness as they will be explored in "Glasses." The opposition between the two men and their

respective social worlds is finally seen in terms of women's role, as an opposition between the different potential for expansion they offer—an opposition that will provide one of the key structural features in *The Portrait of a Lady*:

Poor little Briseux, ugly, shabby, disreputable, seemed to me some appealing messenger from the mysterious immensity of life; and Harold, beside him, comely, elegant, imposing, justly indignant, seemed to me simply his narrow, personal, ineffectual self. (3: 84)

The choice the young woman is faced with thus occasions an explicit diagnosis of women's condition:

We women are so habitually condemned by fate to act simply in what is called the domestic sphere, that there is something intoxicating in the opportunity to exert a far-reaching influence outside of it. . . . I seemed to be the end of an electric chain, of which the rest was throbbing away through time. (3: 86-87)

In this view, art and its promise of immortality no longer appear as the aesthetic interruption and arrest Theobald would have imposed on life's flow, but as a means for woman to escape the strictures of a preordained existential situation wholly enclosed within the "domestic sphere." What the story seems to be saying is that only by rejecting repression and idealization and by going in for a free, in-depth exploration of life—with all its wealth of contradictions, and regardless of the boundaries of artistic and social conventions—can art be seen no longer as an imprisoning and limiting power but as an agent of liberation.

But the adventure of the woman in the yellow shawl does not come to an end at this euphoric moment, the transitory and delusive quality of which the adjective "intoxicating" effectively conveys. There is a gap between the bold and eager girl in the studio and the "modest spinster," "gently but frankly eccentric" (3: 57, 58), the narrator meets in the museum; a gap the text does not bridge, but rather tends to emphasize:

As I sat before the picture just now, I felt in all my pulses that I am not the person who stands masquerading there with that strangely cynical smile. That poor girl is dead and buried; I should tell no falsehood in saying I'm not she. (3: 59)

"I am *not*," "masquerading," signal a radical non-identity, something which goes beyond the mere passing of time and allows for the continuity of personal identity. "That poor girl is dead and buried," the protagonist declares, and a "musty Musée" appropriately surrounds the portrait with that "sepulchral chill which clings to such knowledge of us as posterity enjoys" (3: 57): these are images of death, in sharp contrast with the former promise of immortality. Both an imperishable art object and a tombstone, the portrait is the estranged objectification of a self that no longer exists—or rather, of a self whose existence lasted only a fleeting moment, the time it took for it to become transmuted into a portrait: the short time of a single sitting, at the end of which the sitter "had already passed into that dusky limbo of unhonored victims, the experience-intellectual and other—of genius" (3: 86). Once the sitting is over, the woman in the yellow shawl sets her costume aside: "I left him the yellow shawl, that he might finish that part of his work at his leisure" (3: 86). This marks a decisive threshold beyond which her life story will be a non-story, which appropriately is not told. To emphasize the sense of her non-existence, the woman has no name other than the symbol for namelessness inscribed in the label of her portrait: *Portrait of M.lle X*—, or, *Portrait of a Lady in a Yellow Shawl*—where the Yellow Shawl acts as the synecdoche of an otherwise non-existent identity.

Once again, life and art are incompatible alternatives whose temporal regimes are mutually exclusive. It is, as James would later write, art that makes life—but not quite. The identity evoked by artistic representation is fixed forever in the picture but does not succeed in providing a practicable existential course, a satisfactory life continuity. The image is (relatively) deathless, but the woman's identity it conveys is a mere visual trick, an effect of physical and psychological tridimensionality produced by a skillfully painted canvas; the person is "dead and buried," since art, while allowing her to escape a limiting and reductive self-definition, has nevertheless been unable to actualize any other. Briseux's exit from the scene is in this sense evidence of James's definite and disillusioned anti-idealism: he nips the sentimental plot in the bud so as not to have his readers confuse art with the artist. Art's liberating power exists only within the regime of artistic representation, and there is no going beyond its boundaries: a portrait, after all, is just a portrait.

Entrance into an aesthetic dimension is, finally, a cruel alternative to

the repetitiveness of the domestic sphere: the doubling it implies is a loss of one's self, an act—as the narrator well sees—of radical dispossession: "How did it seem to her to find herself so strangely lifted out of her own possession and made a helpless spectator of her survival to posterity?" (3: 57). But any analogy with the romantic and decadent motif of the "vampirism" of the portrait is only superficial: James's version is materialistic, so to speak, because it is rooted in an understanding of the economic and ideological grounds of women's subjection. It is by no means fortuitous that economic imagery, as is often the case with James, recurs with reference to the portrait, describing the young woman as "a model to make a painter's fortune" (3: 79) and Briseux's appropriation of brush, canvas, and colors as "a loan" that will be "return[ed] with interest" (3: 82). Even the promise of immortality is, explicitly, far from disinterested: it is a pawn of sorts, a pledge the painter offers as security against the opening of a credit: "'I'll make you immortal,' he murmured; 'I'll delight mankind—and I'll begin my own career!'" (3: 85). Significantly, the young woman's choice to sit for Briseux is presented as a substitute for the golden louis that the painter would not accept from a woman:

... "I won't go so far as to say that I'm proud.... But from a lady, ma foi! it's beggarly—it's humiliating. Excuse me then if I refuse; I mean to ask for something else.... Bestow your charity on the artist... Keep your louis; go and stand as you've been standing for this picture The few scrawls I shall make here will be your alms." (3: 80)

Alms, an act of charity—that is to say, not an even exchange but an unequal transaction, a free act of dedication which will find its reward, if any, only in the realm of the immaterial. This is where the aesthetic sphere proves both contiguous and in complicity with the domestic sphere, regardless of the different spatial and temporal range of each: what they share is the deep rationale that allows women no other ground for personal identity but that of being of service to others. Selflessness, the female virtue *par excellence* for the Victorians,¹⁶ is successfully literalized in the "gift of herself" performed by a woman who is consequently left, precisely, with no self to speak of: with no story and no name, deprived of the fate and social identity that only a man could have bestowed on her: neither Mrs Staines nor the sweetheart of M. Briseux, but just M.lle X.

Art as an alternative, in other words, is *necessarily* a delusive one: all it can do is to offer the alienation of self as a free gift in opposition to the alienation of self within the marriage contract. Be it as the chance starting point for an artistic transfiguration which will change an obscure Bohemian into a famous painter or as the "buoyant body" required to keep the parody of a patriarch afloat and to "float him into success" (3: 71), woman is equally reified: in either case her identity is merely instrumental. Either as a wife enclosed in the domestic sphere or as a Muse projected into eternity, her life is not her own and her portrait represents, not her, but the costume someone else has chosen for her: be it a black dress or a yellow shawl.

¹ This essay is part of a work in progress whose tentative title is *La signora e i suoi ritratti. La rappresentazione del femminile nei racconti di Henry James*. Parts of it have already been published in *RSA Journal, Merope*, and as an introduction to a collection of Jamesian stories (*Rose-Agathe e altre*. Macerata: Liberilibri, 1992). I refer the reader to such partial excerpts, as well as to the volume in its entirety (if ever it gets itself completed), for a more detailed analysis of such issues as I have only made cursory mention of in this essay.

² The story was published in *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1873, and reprinted in *A Passionate Pilgrim* (1875) and *The Madonna of the Future* (1879). Quotations are from *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, reproducing the first volume publication.

³ For an analysis of the relation between James's story and its sources see Kelley; Ross; Tintner 1986; Melchiori (certainly the subtlest and richest of these readings).

⁴ Cristina Giorcelli also blames Theobald's failure on Serafina's "inert, sordid and vulgar personality" and on her "massive passive resistance" (Giorcelli 140, my translation); she only deals with this issue briefly, however, since her main focus is Italy as aesthetic experience. Guido Fink explicitly dissociates himself from what he deems the "moralistic judgments, out of context with the character," on Serafina; he traces Theobald's failure back to the "disproportion between a delirious aesthetic dream and objective reality, a conflict far from unusual in James" (Fink 22, my translation). Fink's critical reading of this story is still, in my opinion, the best to date.

⁵ See Fink.

⁶ "As a proof of my conscientiousness ... I've never sold a picture! 'At least no merchant traffics in my heart!' Do you remember the line in Browning? My little studio has never been profaned by superficial, feverish, mercenary work. It's a temple of labor, but of leisure!" (3: 16).

⁷ James did not entirely share the enthusiastic, frequently acritical tribute his age paid to Raphael. In some letters of 1869, for instance, he had expressed his reservations about the "general formal indifferent beauty," lacking in intellectual content, of his painting, and he had declared himself "actually surprised at its thinness" (*Letters* 1: 150, 165-66). In the "Florentine Notes," published in *Transatlantic Sketches* (1875), James would be critical of the

compunctious, fetishistic attitude of the public when facing the *Madonna of the Chair*, gazed at like "a kind of semi-sacred, an almost miraculous, manifestation." For James's views on Raphael and their relevance to this story, see Shackelford.

8 Past/Present and America/Europe are of course the most prominent, but several other oppositions are connected to these within a coherent system: reality vs. dream (Theobald's sudden apparition in his Raphaellesque costume makes him look "picturesque, fantastic, slightly unreal," 3: 12, while in the moonlight "'the past hovers about us like a dream made visible'," 3: 13); light vs. shadow (both physically and metaphorically: the masterpieces in the Uffizi, for instance, are glowing "in a luminous atmosphere of their own," 3: 19, whereas nowadays "'the days of illumination are gone'," 3: 21); the barrenness of America as a "thirsty land" vs. the expected gush of a "slender stream of beauty" (3: 15); exile vs. the promised land, with the artist as a possible Moses; the critical vs. the idealistic approach to art. The list could continue.

9 The story was published in *Galaxy*, June 1873, and never appeared in book form in James's lifetime. Quotations are from *The Collected Tales of Henry James*.

10 Even while altering names and titles, James's story makes clear reference to debates in French painting in the 1830s, and particularly to the controversy between Ingres's academism and Delacroix's romantic colorism—the latter, as is well known, very much admired by James. For an analysis of the debate as background for the story, see Tintner 1986, 9-10, 49-51.

11 "'You make me nervous,' he suddenly declared. . . . I began to pity him. . . . 'If it wearies you,' I said, 'give it up.' ... [He] was hesitating to ask me seriously whether in giving up his picture he gave up something more" (3: 74).

12 On James's use of *Mona Lisa* in this story see Tintner 1981.

13 For a classical study of the myth of the artist see Kris and Kurz; on the portrait motif and its literary and cultural implications (with particular but not exclusive reference to classical culture) see Bettini 1991 and 1992. On James's fascination with the portrait motif see Melchiori, 32, 43n.

14 "The Story of a Masterpiece" was first published in *Galaxy*, January-February 1868. Quotations are from *The Complete Tales of Henry James*.

15 A precedent for this incident is in "The Story of a Masterpiece," where Lennox furiously stabs Marian's portrait: "'Come! ... Marian may be what God has made her; but this detestable creature I can neither love nor respect!" (1: 295).

16 On the ideology of selflessness and on the "domestic sphere" see, among others, Newton; Armstrong; Nead; Reynolds and Humble.

Works Cited

Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction. A Political History of the Novel*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.

Bettini, Maurizio, ed. *La maschera, il doppio e il ritratto*. Bari: Laterza, 1991.

–. *Il ritratto dell'amante*. Torino: Einaudi, 1992.

- Fink, Guido. "Il colore sui vuoto: James e Malamud a Firenze." *America-Europa: la circolazione delle idee*. Ed. Tiziano Bonazzi. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1976.
- Giorcelli, Cristina. *Henry James e l'Italia*. Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1968.
- James, Henry. "The Story of a Masterpiece." *The Complete Tales of Henry James*. Ed. Leon Edel. Vol. 1. London: Hart-Davis, 1962. 12 vols. 1962-64.
- . "The Madonna of the Future." *The Complete Tales*. Vol. 3.
- . "The Sweetheart of M. Briseux." *The Complete Tales*. Vol. 3.
- . *Letters*. Ed. Leon Edel. Vol. 1. London: Macmillan, 1974.
- Kelley, Cornelia P. *The Early Development of Henry James*. 1930. Urbana: Illinois UP, 1965.
- Kris, Ernst, and Kurz, Otto. *Die Legende vom Künstler: Ein historischer Versuch*. Wien: Krystall, 1934.
- Melchiori, Giorgio. "La lezione al maestro: Robert Browning"; "Un Déjeuner sur l'herbe," Barbara Melchiori and Giorgio Melchiori, *Il gusto di Henry James*. Torino: Einaudi, 1974.
- Nead, Lynda. *Myths of Sexuality. Representations of Women in Victorian Britain*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988.
- Newton, Judith Lowder. *Women, Power, and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1981.
- Pacteau, Francette. *The Symptom of Beauty*. London: Reaktion, 1994.
- Pearce, Lynne. *Woman/Image/Text. Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature*. London: Harvester, 1991.
- Rasy, Elisabetta. *Le donne e la letteratura. Scrittrici eroine e ispiratrici nel mondo delle lettere*. Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1984.
- Reynolds, Kimberley, and Nicola Humble. *Victorian Heroines. Representations of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Art*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1993.
- Ross, Michael L. "Henry James's 'Half-Man': The Legacy of Browning in 'The Madonna of the Future.'" *Browning Institute Studies* 2 (1974): 25-42.
- Shackelford, Lynne P. "The Significance of the Raphael References in Henry James's 'The Madonna of the Future.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 27: 1 (1990): 101-04.
- Tintner, Adeline R. "Henry James's Mona Lisa." *Essays in Literature* 8: 1 (1981): 105-08.
- . *The Museum World of Henry James*. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1986. 27-30.